

The School Board Corner

By Tom Villacres, Garrisonville District

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Our school year sure started out with some unusual weather – and showed us that the people of Stafford will pull together in times of need. The School System was proud to support the County Emergency Management Services by opening a community shelter during and after hurricane Isabel. I'm sure we all learned something about preparedness and coordination, but the big story was the teamwork and good will that were evident throughout the County as we attempted to deal with nature's fury. I hope everyone is back to normal by now and that we can look forward to calm weather for the rest of the school year.

The School Board has been focusing a lot of its energy recently on dealing with the current crowding in many of our schools and the projected increases in the school population in the next several years. As a result of the increasing rate of growth in Stafford County, we moved up several projects in our Capital Improvements Program, which is our plan for building new schools. We are working hard to complete several new schools in the next few years and will continue to schedule new schools to relieve overcrowding. The September 2004 elementary school that will open on Mountainview Road will provide some relief in the north and another elementary school is due to open in the Leeland Station area in 2005. Site work has also begun for our fifth high school, which will also be on Mountainview Road next to the elementary school and is scheduled to open in fall of 2005.

The schools on Mountainview Road – referred to as the Armstrong Property – and the Leeland Station elementary school are part of a Public Private Partnership with the Haskell Hess Company. In conjunction with the Board of Supervisors, we agreed to share the school sites with private ventures in order to enhance the value to the community and return revenue to the County. The process has been challenging as we moved through uncharted waters with many people who have not worked so closely together before. The School Board is committed to ensuring quality schools are built inexpensively for the community. We also have pledged to work with our County government to take advantage of opportunities to add value to our community as it grows so rapidly.

You may have heard about the federal reports issued recently on the No Child Left Behind legislation. The reports of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) can be confusing, especially since we have been working on and watching SOL accreditation for the past several years. AYP requires us to measure how well seven subgroups of students are performing in up to 35 categories. Just one unsatisfactory score by any subgroup of students in any of these 35 categories can cause a school not to meet AYP. In fact, of the 840 AYP benchmarks, Stafford County Public Schools met 98 percent of those standards. We continue to work hard to meet all of the AYP benchmarks and to avoid labeling schools based on only a few scores out of many. Not meeting AYP does not mean a school is failing. Our schools will be glad to share more information with you about AYP.

Have a great school year and please keep your School Board representatives advised about your concerns and compliments for our school system.

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